

FEMINISM AND THE SOCIETY AND STEREOTYPE OF BHARAT WITH REFERENCE TO CHITRA BANERJEE DIVAKARUNI'S THE PALACE OF ILLUSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is a prominent English Indian writer. Her novel, The Palace of Illusions is one of the most famous novels, it is a re-telling of Vyasa's Mahabharat from Draupadis's point of view. The Palace of Illusions is about how Draupadi felt about what all happened with her throughout her life, it is also about the discrimination that happened with females, how the females were treated during that time, how the society of that time was a male dominated society, and what position and significance did the females of the royal family and upper-class families of the society held during that time.

Draupadi, brought a great change in the Indian History, she came out as a very powerful female of her times. The novel is about what Draupadi felt, when she had to marry five men at a time, it is about her feelings, what she felt with what all happened with her throughout her life since her birth, as when she was born, her father did not accepted her happily. With all the discrimination and difficulties that draupadi faced, she still came out as a very powerful female and is still considered one in the Indian History.

This research paper analyses Draupadi and the other female characters of the epic saga Mahabharat. The paper will also highlight feminism and the stereotypical society during that time.

Keywords: Alienation, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Feministic Perspective, Indian Society, Re-telling Mahabharat.

INTRODUCTION

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni who's full name is Chitra Lekha Banerjee Divakaruni seems to be a Feminist author, almost all her works are female centric with a feministic approach and a female protagonist in it, whether it is *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Mistress of Spices*, *The Last Queen* or *The Forest of Enchantments*, they are all female centric novels with a female protagonist and a feministic approach in it.

The Forest of Enchantments is again a retelling of the great epic saga *Ramayan*, from the point of view of *Sita*, just like *The Palace of Illusions* is a retelling of another great epic saga *Mahabharat* from the point of view of *Draupadi*.

Since the very beginning, *Mahabharat* and *Ramayan* have always been told from a male centric perspective. On the other hand, *Divakaruni* has brought an altogether different version of these epic sagas by retelling them from a female centric perspective and a female's point of view in her novels *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments*. She has very beautifully retold these epic sagas from *Draupadis's* and *Sita's* point of view. 'It is her life, her voice, her questions, and her

vision that I invite you into in *The Palace of Illusions* '(The *Palace of Illusions*, Author's Note, page xv)

The title of the novel, *The Palace of Illusions* denotes *Indraprasth*, which was the kingdom of the *Pandavs* and *Draupadi*. The Palace of *Indraprasth* was a beautiful palace, it was created by magic, everything was illusionary in that palace.

The title of the novel ' *The Palace Of Illusions* ' also denotes the idea, that what *Draupadi* thought, that the palace of *Indraprasth* belongs to her and that she also have the rights on the palace and that she is the most powerful women because she is married to the most powerful men of their time were all her illusion, because during the *Dhuth Sabha* whatever happened with *Draupadi*, after that all her Illusions that she created in her mind, were destroyed and she realized the reality that she was living in a Palace Of Illusions, where nothing was real.

Draupadi also struggled and sacrificed a lot since her birth, as when she was born out of fire, after her brother *Dhrishtadyumna*, her father gave all the attention to her brother and refused her. "In his own harsh and obsessive way, he was generous, maybe even indulgent. But I couldn't forgive him for that

initial rejection. Perhaps that was why, as I grew from a girl into a young woman, I didn't trust him completely". (The *Palace of Illusions*, page 6)

Draupadi had to sacrifice herself as she had to marry all the five *Pandavs* at a time, which was something very difficult and uncommon for a woman to do. As *Kunti* instructed the *Pandavs* to do so. "Son, said a woman's voice in a patrician accent, I can't come right now or the food will burn. But as always, whatever you brought should be shared equally amongst all my sons". (The *Palace of Illusions*, page 107)

It is seen in the novel, how *Draupadi* was treated by her husbands, she was not very happy with the way her husbands treated her except *Bheem*. He was the only one, who treated her with utmost love. He loved her the most amongst all her husbands. "None of my husbands cared in the same way. When I lost my temper, they pragmatically found themselves things to do elsewhere. Only *Bheem* would remain, hanging his head as I railed on, until I grew ashamed and skidded to a stop". (The *Palace of Illusions*, page 211)

What happened at the *Dhuth Sabha* with *Draupadi* also shows her condition in her family and amongst her husbands, as firstly, whatever property and assets that *Yudhishtir* kept at stake was not only his but *Draupadi* also had her rights on those assets, still *Yudhishtir*, didn't ask her before keeping them at stake in the game. And after that, he even kept *Draupadi* at stake in the game considering her as his property, this shows how women were treated as a thing and as a property of their husbands and not as human beings. "My mouth went dry. Denials collided with each other inside me. I'm a queen. Daughter of *Drupad*, sister of *Dhrishtadyumna*. Mistress of the greatest palace on earth. I can't be gambled away like a bag of coins, or summoned to court like a dancing girl. But then I remembered what I'd read long ago in a book, never imagining that quaint law could ever have any power over me. The wife is the property of the husband, no less so than a cow or a slave". (The *Palace of Illusions*, page 190)

Despite the fact, that all the five *pandavs* were present, *Guru Drona* was present, *Pitamah Bheeshma* was present in the *Sabha*, still *Dussasan* undressed *Draupadi* in front of all of them, she even cried for help, but none of them helped her. "I called to the grandfather to protect me, certain that he at least would intervene. Had he not called me his dearest granddaughter? Had he not shared with

me tender confidences that he kept from others? Had he not helped me become Queen of The Palace of Illusions? But to my disbelief, he sat with his head lowered." (The *Palace of Illusions*, page 192)

Not only *Draupadi*, but the other female characters of The *Mahabharat* have also struggled and sacrificed a lot, whether it is *Gandhari* the mother of the *Kauravs* and the wife of *Dhritrashtra* or *Kunti* the mother of *Pandavs* and the wife of *Pandu*.

Gandhari sacrificed her vision by blindfolding herself because her husband was blind. She could have led a very happy and a luxurious life, enjoying seeing the beauty of the world around her through her eyes, but she sacrificed her vision and blindfolded herself.

On the same hand, *Kunti* who was a widow, she also sacrificed and struggled throughout her life, to make her sons the king of the kingdom of *Hastinapur*.

It seemed as if these queens, whether it is *Draupadi*, *Gandhari* or *Kunti*, they all were *Alienated* in and by the society, they didn't have any stand of their own, all of them were somewhere dominated and suppressed by the males of their families and also by the male dominated society in which they were living in.

India has always been a *Patriarchal Society* since the very beginning, it has always been a male dominated society, which gave the women big posts that of a queen or a princess, but with that they gave her no powers with that post.

It was *Draupadi*, who came out as a strong and powerful character in the end after what happened at the *Dhuth Sabha*. "Then – maybe because there was no one else who could help – I thought of Krishna. He owed me nothing; we were not related. Perhaps that was why I could fix my mind on him without being swept away by the anger that arises from expectations. I thought of his smile, the way it would appear on his face for no reason. The sounds of the courtroom faded - *Dussasan's* grunts, the whispers of the watchers. Suddenly I was in a garden. There were swans in a lake, a tree that arched above, dropping blue flowers, the sound of water falling as though the world had no end. The wind smelled of sandalwood. Krishna sat beside me on a cool stone bench. His glance was bright and tender. No one can shame you, he said, if you don't allow it. It came to me, in a wash of amazement, that he was right. Let them stare at my nakedness, I thought. Why should I care? They and not I should

be ashamed for shattering the bounds of decency. Was that not miracle enough? "(The *Palace of Illusions*, page 193)

"In the novel, Draupadi was presented as a bold Character. She stood against her humiliation and dishonor. Patriarchy system is always supposed superior even in the present times". (Draupadis's *suffering as a woman in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions*, Sharma Neha, 2021)

CONCLUSION

"The Palace of Illusions "by *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* has emerged as a significant novel in context with *feminism*, with the *society* and the *stereotype* of that period and with the context of the condition of the females of that time. It not only

just tells about *Draupadi*, but it also talks about the other female characters like *Kunti* and *Gandhari* as well. It is retelling *Mahabharat* through the point of view and through the perspective of *Draupadi*.

This research paper with the help of *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions* helps in knowing the perspective of *Draupadi* towards the epic saga of *Mahabharat*. It tells about all the possible feelings and thoughts that *Draupadi* must have had throughout the different phases of her life. It talks about the condition of the females of the royal families of those times, it also tells about the *Stereotypical Society* of those times and what position and power did the females of the royal and powerful families held during those times.

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